WOMEN IN POLITICS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Everyone, regardless of race, color, sex, language, religion, birth, or other status, is born free and equal in dignity and rights, and everyone has the right to all rights and freedoms. Women, on the other hand, have historically been treated as second-class citizens in practically all countries across the world. Despite the fact that the Indian Constitution promises equal opportunity, women's presence in legislative bodies and political activity at all levels is minimal. These rights are still only available for women on a de jure basis rather than in practice. Women's political engagement in India is a complicated issue impacted by a variety of circumstances. This study discusses the psychological, socioeconomic, and political issues that prevent women from entering politics. This study draws on a variety of sources, including books and articles, to support these elements. Furthermore, the study concludes that equal participation of both the gender is not only a need for democracy but also for the upliftment of marginalized communities, including women.

Keywords: Women, Political Participation, Rights, India.

INTRODUCTION

"The male, unless constituted in some respect contrary in nature, is by nature more expert at leading than the female, and the elder and complete than the younger and incomplete"

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Aristotle

Women's political engagement is seen as a critical component of all forms of development; nonetheless, India's gender equality policies continue to be scrutinized. Following India's independence in 1947, there have been numerous efforts to boost women's political representation through decentralization of power in the country's different local self-government institutions. The establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions has expanded the participation of marginalized groups of society, especially women, in political decision-making.

Women's political participation in any country provides a snapshot of how women are treated in society. Any country's progress is also dependent on equitable involvement of men and women. Because women's participation in Indian politics appears to be limited, it is the responsibility of every human being to educate them about their rights and encourage them to participate. Not only does India's constitution ensure social equality, but it also pushes governments to take special steps for women. Women continue to battle for equality in society. Their difficulties and problems are often ignored and unnoticed due to their minimal representation in Indian politics. Their true demands are not brought to the attention of the decision-makers. Women must be self-reliant in order to make their own decisions.

The media has a tremendous impact on how society views and perceives women in politics and decision-making bodies in general. It not only contributes to the formation of societal ideals, but it also reflects those values. It functions as a social change informant, educator, and mediator. Women's equitable involvement is required for successful democratic governance, and the media must assess their contribution to these processes in the right perspective. Women's voices and concerns, which account for half of the country's population, cannot be disregarded or marginalized in a true democracy.

Empowerment should be regarded as a component of seeing oneself as a decision-maker. Female empowerment enables people to take charge of their own lives, plan their own schedules, and request state and community aid in making the shift.

Women's roles are inextricably linked to growth in many societies, although they are not always highlighted in the same way that men's roles are. As a result, it is thought that females require greater help due to their significant role in decision-making and social growth.

FACTORS INVOLVED

Politics encompasses a wide variety of activities involving communal decision-making or other forms of power dynamics between people, such as resource distribution or social status. It is a relationship between a state and people residing in it, whether it be a man or a woman.

Women gained legal equality because of the creation of the Constitution. Despite the fact that constitutional and statutory provisions allowed women to leave the relative safety of the house and enter the political sphere dominated by men, women's participation in politics has been relatively limited. Political engagement is a complicated phenomenon that may be understood by looking at a variety of elements, which we are discussing in this work.

Psychological Factor:

Women in Indian culture are primarily responsible for parenting and caring. As a result, they develop a psychological makeup and adopt the job of "care-giver," preferring to remain in the private domain, i.e., at home. Women have been side lined in all domains of life, including social, economic, and, more specifically, political, as a result of this private-public divide. In addition to the household responsibilities for which she has been socialized to feel she is solely responsible; women must work outside the home. This leads to unnecessarily lengthy working hours, which discourages women from taking on time-consuming political work[i].

The psychological variable refers to how interested and worried persons are about politics and public affairs. In India, women's attitudes regarding politics are often apathetic. They are less inclined to engage in affairs of state, talk about it, or attend public sessions, or have an impact on policy decisions[ii]. Unfortunately, politics in India is associated with unhealthy

competitiveness, displays of physical might, and a greedy might for power, and in this sense, they would rather not be associated with this field[iii].

It is seen as a sought masculine realm in addition to being a "dirty game." Politics is essentially the art of attaining and wielding power—power over decision-making processes and policies, as well as the ability to execute the desired changes[iv]. It is a protected field because of its engagement with authority and decision-making.

Men are supposed to make decisions, and women are supposed to follow them. They are anticipated to follow the men's lead. In comparison to men, they do not enter the "power zone" and are less politically efficacious and interested in politics. Rationality, self-discipline, competition, and universality are all regarded crucial qualities for political involvement. Males are thought to have an abundance of these. Women, on the other hand, are connected with characteristics such as submissiveness, impulsivity, indiscipline, and irrationality. Women are marginalized in politics as a result of this gender stereotype, since they are instructed to stay away from politics and perform solely feminine and non-competitive positions.

It is suggested that men should focus on political issues while women should focus on domestic issues.[v] Role conflicts occur during adolescence as a result of the family and child-care duties. Women who want to pursue a career in politics do so after they have completed their commitments to their families. This, on the other hand, presents them with a tougher task since they must use more vitality and try hard to compete with the males who have a head start.[vi] As a result, political equality can only be realized if the socialization process emphasizes that the major responsibility for child-care and home-making is not that of women, thus changing the gender role stereotype. Women should not be led to believe that participating in politics is unsuitable for them.

This shift in her mindset would undoubtedly influence her interest in politics and public affairs, leading to a shift in women's political involvement levels. Anyone concerned about political concerns and surrounded by political tensions is more inclined to engage in politics than someone who is entirely absorbed in their own lives. Stepping away from the domestic responsibilities of the woman would be successful in causing a shift in her priorities.

Socio Economic Factor

The factors like age, education, occupation, income, religion, race, family history, residence, and other socioeconomic factors all influence political participation. All of these characteristics may have distinct effects on involvement in different political and cultural situations, and their impact on participation may be inconsistent.

In general, those with a greater level of education and socioeconomic class have easier access to politics than those who are illiterate or of lower socioeconomic status. Furthermore, dominant ethnic and religious groupings, those from political families, permanent residents, and city inhabitants tend to fare well in politics.[vii]

Along with these broad principles, a woman's social milieu has a significant impact on her political participation. In India, the family is the most powerful social force in the lives of women, who are primarily confined (mentally, if not physically) to the home. Her father, sibling, or husband are usually thought to be the ones who shape her identity and life path. Her minimal political education and socialization takes place in the context of her family and home.

Women are discouraged from engaging in political work and any action linked to it due to societal and familial constraints. Unless they are extremely eager in winning votes for a candidate of their preference, men rarely encourage women to vote. On the other hand, if they perceive that their preferred candidate can only win with female support, they do not feel compelled to bring their wives with them to vote. Women are also hesitant to vote because they have too many home responsibilities. The majority of women work as contract workers in the unorganized sector or in the private or small business sector. They are not permitted to vote at these services. Furthermore, several pregnancies, nursing, having too many siblings to care for, and having a poor health state all function as deterrents.[viii]

The cost of elections is a major impediment to women's participation, as the majority of women lack financial power and their families are hesitant to support them. Women do not have legal authority over their property and do not have effective control over their earnings. If people work from home, their work is termed "invisible" or "shadow" work and is not recognized as significant or remunerative. When a spouse, father, or sibling works outside the family and earns money, they control assets. Her position becomes vulnerable as a result of rising unemployment and exploitation, such as differential remuneration for equal work between men and women, overt or covert impediments to female labor entry or upward mobility, unequal

access to resources, and so on. As a result, she does not have a significant reserve to spend on her campaign.

In addition to these socioeconomic issues, women-politicians, activists, and decision-makers face calumny, threats, and violence. Women who have dared to enter politics have been subjected to physical assaults, rape, and murder. They are frequently mocked and discouraged. Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Ranganath Misra recommended women to stay at home and not work outside the house[ix]. Prejudices, stereotypical thinking, and the social environment all work against equal participation.

Political Factor

In the political domain, there is a significant gender divide in voting and contestation. Many important aspects in the political climate have an impact on this. The state's nature, growth stage, the mode of production, general political condition, and election system, and so on are all contextual elements that influence people's political engagement. Women are more affected by these determinants than men.[x]

The employment of a proportional representation system rather than a plurality-majority system is commonly accepted to improve women's achievements. Aside from the electoral system, the country's entire political climate inhibits women from participating in politics. The ruling class in India has damaged the government and other public institutions' regular operations. This demoralizes all citizens, but it has a particularly negative impact on women. In the public domain, women have a lower ability to employ money, muscle force, and other forms of influence[xi]. Women have been further discouraged by the criminalization of politics and the rising wave of violence.

As a result of their increased exposure to insecurity, corruption, and criminalization, Indian women have developed a dislike for politics. Political parties, which are the principal organizations through which citizens contest elections, dominate India's political scene. Parties outlined their values in their manifestos prior to the elections, emphasizing their policy viewpoints. Describing their policy viewpoints all political parties' manifestos promise to implement the program aimed at improving the lives of women. Women's conditions, however, have not improved as a result of their efforts.

Even in competition, there remains a gender divide. Women have historically been reluctant to be given tickets by political parties. They prefer to offer masculine candidates tickets. Because of social beliefs that discourage women from entering politics, political parties are frequently hesitant to take the risk of nominating women as candidates. Unless it is a designated seat, they prefer that women support rather than run for office. A large number of women run as independent candidates after being denied a ticket by the parties. Because the entire game of power is run through parties, they are rarely successful. An independent candidate has a weaker platform than a party candidate.[xii]

It is important to remember that our political system is based on political parties. Women must carve out a position for themselves in political parties if they wish to share power. The failure of political parties to create a place for women over a fifty-year period demonstrates their inability to do so. The nature of women's functioning, as well as the party's attitude toward women and women's problems, are unaffected by their involvement. It is also likely that the number of female politicians is currently low. As a result, they must follow the lead of domineering male members in order to have a greater say in future decision-making.

We now feel compelled to make provisions for the reservation in order to increase women's involvement in politics. There were 22 women in the first Lok Sabha, 27 in the second, and 34 in the third. The fourth (31 members), fifth (22 members), and sixth (189 members) Parliaments all saw a drop. The next Lok Sabha had a total of 28 members, which was increased to 44 in 1984.The following parliament had fluctuating figures of 28 in the 9th, 39 in the 10th, and 40 in the 11th, rising to 44 in the 12th, 49 in the 13th, and 45 in the 14th.[xiii]

The casting of one's vote is a significant feature of political participation. Citizens vote to form a government, which then makes decisions on behalf of the entire population. Despite the fact that the number of women voters has increased, female voters have always been about 6% lower than male voters. Because of the increased number of voters, several political parties are focusing more on organizing and campaigning among women. Such efforts were previously made exclusively during election seasons, in the guise of certain 'Populistic and opportunistic short-term' pledges. In response to the changing conditions, political parties have formed regular party forums, cells, and other mechanisms to mobilize women and seek their support.

Illiteracy is partly to blame, as is the lack of accessibility to the electoral machinery, which is mostly due to the lengthy voting procedure. To get one's name added to the electoral roll, one may have to deal with a number of issues.

The Lack of sufficient publicity of the revision programmed is one of the most typical issues. Women's incapacity to complete the formalities, the enumerator's disinterest or personal prejudices of caste, religion, sex, etc. are other factors. Political parties do not always show enough attention until their own followers are involved.[xiv]

As a result, women remain on the outskirts of the power structure. They lack the political awareness required to create and implement policies that reflect women's goals. Their presence is more of a "symbol" than "actual power wielding." A successful democracy requires a participatory society in which power is distributed among people and citizens' representatives make authentic decisions. Unfortunately, India's democracy lacks the effective participation of all of its residents.

CONCLUSION

"Women and men have the same nature in respect to the guardianship of the state, save in so far as the one is weaker and the other is stronger."

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Plato

Equal involvement is essential to strengthen women's positions in society. This is not just a demand for simple fairness or democracy; it is a requirement for human survival. Women's participation in politics and accountability has the potential to alter institutional policies, vision, and structure. They could refocus political goals and add new items to the political agenda to address gender-related concerns and offer a fresh perspective on current issues. Women have traditionally been disregarded in the development process.[xv]

Change is unavoidable. Women will only grow if they are given decision-making roles. It's also vital to get rid of patriarchal attitudes. Patriarchy should not be considered as an "insurmountable ghost," but rather as something that must be combated. Education, scientific

worldview growth, legal safeguards, masculine enlightenment, and women's knowledge of their own potential are all effective influences in this direction. Women's leadership, as well as their self-confidence and morale, can help to transform the situation, and providing them with information. It is not just about the numbers. The ability of women leaders to detect difficulties and efficiently resolve them is crucial to their success. The leaders' sensitization to gender concerns would go a long way. Simultaneously, huge legal awareness campaigns must be initiated, as laws are ineffective unless women are aware of them and are able to put them into practice.

The most dramatic change, however, is in women's perceptions, or a 'revolution of consciousness in women's minds. They should understand that they are legally equal to men, and that none of their rights should be taken away from them. Their acceptance of their equality and belief in their own abilities would have a significant impact on the political landscape.

ENDNOTES

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